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APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

**Managing Timeline Modification and Synchronization
of Multiple Media Streams in Networked Client/Server
Systems**

Inventor(s):
Nosakhare D. Omoigui
Anoop Gupta

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RELATED APPLICATIONS

This is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/153,664, filed September 15, 1998, entitled "Multimedia Timeline Modification in Networked Client/Server Systems".

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to networked client/server systems and to managing the streaming and rendering of multimedia content in such systems.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Multimedia streaming—the continuous delivery of synchronized media data like video, audio, text, and animation—is a critical link in the digital multimedia revolution. Today, streaming media is primarily about video and audio, but a richer, broader digital media era is emerging with a profound and growing impact on the Internet and digital broadcasting.

Synchronized media means multiple media objects that share a common timeline. Video and audio are examples of synchronized media—each is a separate data stream with its own data structure, but the two data streams are played back in synchronization with each other. Virtually any media type can have a timeline. For example, an image object can change like an animated .gif file, text can change and move, and animation and digital effects happen over time. This concept of synchronizing multiple media types is gaining greater meaning and currency with the emergence of more sophisticated media composition frameworks implied by MPEG-4, Dynamic HTML, and other media playback environments.

1 The term "streaming" is used to indicate that the data representing the
2 various media types is provided over a network to a client computer on a real-
3 time, as-needed basis, rather than being pre-delivered in its entirety before
4 playback. Thus, the client computer renders streaming data as it is received from a
5 network server, rather than waiting for an entire "file" to be delivered.

6 The widespread availability of streaming multimedia enables a variety of
7 informational content that was not previously available over the Internet or other
8 computer networks. Live content is one significant example of such content.
9 Using streaming multimedia, audio, video, or audio/visual coverage of noteworthy
10 events can be broadcast over the Internet as the events unfold. Similarly,
11 television and radio stations can transmit their live content over the Internet.

12 Although streaming multimedia content compares favorably with more
13 traditional paper-based content in most regards, one disadvantage is that it requires
14 significant time for viewing. It cannot be "skimmed" like paper-based content.
15 Thus, information consumers are forced to choose between the efficiency of the
16 written word and the richness of the multimedia experience.

17 The invention described below addresses this disadvantage of prior art
18 streaming multimedia content, allowing more efficient multimedia perusal of
19 streaming multimedia presentations than has previously been possible.
20

21 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

22 In a client/server network system, multimedia content is streamed from one
23 or more servers to the client. The multimedia content includes multiple media
24 streams that can be streamed to the client from the same server or from different
25 servers. The user is able to modify the playback speed of the multimedia content,

1 allowing the playback to be either speeded up or slowed down. According to one
2 aspect of the invention, the multimedia content includes text streams, image,
3 and/or animation streams.

4 According to one aspect of the invention, a separate control component is
5 included in the client and/or the server for each individual media stream that
6 manages the presentation of that particular media stream. An additional master
7 control component manages the overall timeline modification for all of the streams
8 in the multimedia content. When a user requests a new playback speed the
9 timeline of the master control component is changed (either speeded up or slowed
10 down) in accordance with the user's request. Each of the separate control
11 components is made aware of this change in the master control timeline, either by
12 the master control sending messages to the separate controls indicating the change,
13 or by the separate controls monitoring the master control timeline. Once aware of
14 the change in the master control timeline, each of the separate control components
15 can adjust their timelines accordingly.

16 According to another aspect of the invention, the master control detects
17 when the client/server system will potentially be overloaded (e.g., due to a user
18 request for a change in playback speed). This overloading can be due to requiring
19 too much computational power on the part of the client, or on requiring too much
20 bandwidth between the server and the client. If such an overloading condition
21 exists, the master control takes appropriate action to avoid the overloading. Such
22 actions include, for example, changing timescale modification for selected streams
23 from being performed at the client to being performed at the server, reducing the
24 quality of selected streams, pausing selected streams, etc.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a networked client/server system in accordance with the invention.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram of a networked computer that can be used to implement either a server or a client in accordance with the invention.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating communications and rendering of a composite media stream in accordance with the invention.

Fig. 4 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary process for client-based multimedia time-scale modification.

Fig. 5 is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment in which a plurality of timeline-altered media streams are stored at and provided from a server.

Fig. 6 is a block diagram illustrating another embodiment in which a plurality of timeline-altered media streams are stored at and provided from a server.

Fig. 7 is a block diagram illustrating yet another embodiment in which a plurality of timeline-altered media streams are stored at and provided from a server.

Fig. 8 is a block diagram illustrating yet another embodiment in which a plurality of timeline-altered media streams are stored at and provided from a server.

Fig. 9 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary process for altering the streaming and time-scale modification of the multimedia content.

Fig. 10 is a block diagram illustrating exemplary sets of timeline correlations between the timelines of media streams.

1 Fig. 11 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary process for finding an
2 appropriate presentation time in a new stream when switching from a previous
3 stream to the new stream.

4 Fig. 12 is a diagrammatic illustration of a graphical user interface window
5 having a time-scale-modification tool for changing a playback speed of streaming
6 multimedia content according to one implementation.

7 Fig. 13 is a diagrammatic illustration of a graphical user interface window
8 having a time-scale-modification tool according to a second implementation.

9 Fig. 14 is a diagrammatic illustration of a graphical user interface window
10 having a time-scale-modification tool according to a third implementation.

11 12 **DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

13 **General Network Structure**

14 Fig. 1 shows a client/server network system and environment in accordance
15 with the invention. Generally, the system includes one or more (m) network
16 server computers 102, and one or more (n) network client computers 104. The
17 computers communicate with each other over a data communications network,
18 which in Fig. 1 includes a public network 106 such as the Internet. The data
19 communications network might also include local-area networks and private wide-
20 area networks. Server computers 102 and client computers 104 communicate with
21 one another via any of a wide variety of known protocols, such as the Hypertext
22 Transfer Protocol (HTTP).

23 Multimedia servers 102 have access to streaming media content in the form
24 of different media streams. These media streams can be individual media streams
25 (e.g., audio, video, graphical, etc.), or alternatively composite media streams

1 including multiple such individual streams. Some media streams might be stored
2 as files 108 in a database or other file storage system, while other media streams
3 110 might be supplied to the server on a "live" basis from other data source
4 components through dedicated communications channels or through the Internet
5 itself.

6 The media streams received from servers 102 are rendered at the client
7 computers 104 as a multimedia presentation, which can include media streams
8 from one or more of the servers 102. These different media streams can include
9 one or more of the same or different types of media streams. For example, a
10 multimedia presentation may include two video streams, one audio stream, and
11 one stream of graphical images. A user interface (UI) at the client computer 104
12 allows users to either increase or decrease the speed at which the multimedia
13 presentation is rendered.

14 15 **Streaming Media**

16 In this discussion, streaming media refers to one or more individual media
17 streams being transferred over a network to a client computer on an as-needed
18 basis rather than being pre-delivered in their entirety before playback. Each of the
19 individual media streams corresponds to and represents a different media type and
20 each of the media streams can be rendered by a network client to produce a user-
21 perceivable presentation using a particular presentation medium. The individual
22 media streams can be rendered to produce a plurality of different types of user-
23 perceivable media, including synchronized audio or sound, video graphics or
24 motion pictures, animation, textual content, command script sequences, or other
25 media types that convey time-varying information or content in a way that can be

1 sensed and perceived by a human. The individual media streams have their own
2 timelines, which are synchronized with each other so that the media streams can
3 be rendered simultaneously for a coordinated multimedia presentation. These
4 individual media streams can be delivered to the client computer as individual
5 streams from one or more servers, as a composite media stream(s) from one or
6 more servers, or a combination thereof.

7 In this discussion, the term "composite media stream" describes
8 synchronized streaming data that represents a segment of multimedia content. The
9 composite media stream has a timeline that establishes the speed at which the
10 content is rendered. The composite media stream can be rendered to produce a
11 plurality of different types of user-perceivable media, such as synchronized audio
12 or sound, video graphics or motion pictures, animation, textual content, command
13 script sequences, etc. A composite media stream includes a plurality of individual
14 media streams representing the multimedia content.

15 There are various standards for streaming media content and composite
16 media streams. The "Advanced Streaming Format" (ASF) is an example of such a
17 standard, including both accepted versions of the standard and proposed standards
18 for future adoption. ASF specifies the way in which multimedia content is stored,
19 streamed, and presented by the tools, servers, and clients of various multimedia
20 vendors. ASF provides benefits such as local and network playback, extensible
21 media types, component download, scalable media types, prioritization of streams,
22 multiple language support, environment independence, rich inter-stream
23 relationships, and expandability. Further details about ASF are available from
24 Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington.

1 Regardless of the streaming format used, an individual data stream contains
2 a sequence of digital data units that are rendered individually, in sequence, to
3 produce an image, sound, or some other stimuli that is perceived by a human to be
4 continuously varying. For example, an audio data stream comprises a sequence of
5 sample values that are converted to a pitch and volume to produce continuously
6 varying sound. A video data stream comprises a sequence of digitally-specified
7 graphics frames that are rendered in sequence to produce a moving picture.

8 For a composite media stream, the individual data streams are typically
9 interleaved in a single sequence of data packets. Various types of data
10 compression might be used within a particular data format to reduce
11 communications bandwidth requirements.

12 The sequential data units (such as audio sample values or video frames) of
13 the individual streams are associated with both delivery times and presentation
14 times, relative to an arbitrary start time. The delivery time of a data unit indicates
15 when the data unit should be delivered to a rendering client. The presentation time
16 indicates when the value should be actually rendered. Normally, the delivery time
17 of a data unit precedes the presentation time.

18 The presentation times determine the actual speed of playback. For data
19 streams representing actual events or performances, the presentation times
20 correspond to the relative times at which the data samples were actually recorded.
21 The presentation times of the various different individual data streams are
22 consistent with each other so that the streams remain coordinated and
23 synchronized during playback.
24
25

Exemplary Computer Environment

In the discussion below, the invention will be described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by one or more conventional personal computers. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. Moreover, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the invention may be practiced with other computer system configurations, including hand-held devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based or programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, and the like. In a distributed computer environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote memory storage devices.

Alternatively, the invention could be implemented in hardware or a combination of hardware, software, and/or firmware. For example, one or more application specific integrated circuits (ASICs) could be programmed to carry out the invention.

Fig. 2 shows a general example of a computer 142 that can be used in accordance with the invention. Computer 142 is shown as an example of a computer that can perform the functions of any of client computers 102 or server computers 104 of Fig. 1.

Computer 142 includes one or more processors or processing units 144, a system memory 146, and a system bus 148 that couples various system components including the system memory 146 to processors 144.

The bus 148 represents one or more of any of several types of bus structures, including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, an

1 accelerated graphics port, and a processor or local bus using any of a variety of
2 bus architectures. The system memory includes read only memory (ROM) 150
3 and random access memory (RAM) 152. A basic input/output system (BIOS) 154,
4 containing the basic routines that help to transfer information between elements
5 within computer 142, such as during start-up, is stored in ROM 150. Computer
6 142 further includes a hard disk drive 156 for reading from and writing to a hard
7 disk, not shown, a magnetic disk drive 158 for reading from and writing to a
8 removable magnetic disk 160, and an optical disk drive 162 for reading from or
9 writing to a removable optical disk 164 such as a CD ROM or other optical media.
10 The hard disk drive 156, magnetic disk drive 158, and optical disk drive 162 are
11 connected to the system bus 148 by an SCSI interface 166 or some other
12 appropriate interface. The drives and their associated computer-readable media
13 provide nonvolatile storage of computer readable instructions, data structures,
14 program modules and other data for computer 142. Although the exemplary
15 environment described herein employs a hard disk, a removable magnetic disk 160
16 and a removable optical disk 164, it should be appreciated by those skilled in the
17 art that other types of computer readable media which can store data that is
18 accessible by a computer, such as magnetic cassettes, flash memory cards, digital
19 video disks, random access memories (RAMs) read only memories (ROM), and
20 the like, may also be used in the exemplary operating environment.

21 A number of program modules may be stored on the hard disk, magnetic
22 disk 160, optical disk 164, ROM 150, or RAM 152, including an operating system
23 170, one or more application programs 172, other program modules 174, and
24 program data 176. A user may enter commands and information into computer
25 142 through input devices such as keyboard 178 and pointing device 180. Other

1 input devices (not shown) may include a microphone, joystick, game pad, satellite
2 dish, scanner, or the like. These and other input devices are connected to the
3 processing unit 144 through an interface 182 that is coupled to the system bus. A
4 monitor 184 or other type of display device is also connected to the system bus
5 148 via an interface, such as a video adapter 186. In addition to the monitor,
6 personal computers typically include other peripheral output devices (not shown)
7 such as speakers and printers.

8 Computer 142 operates in a networked environment using logical
9 connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computer 188.
10 The remote computer 188 may be another personal computer, a server, a router, a
11 network PC, a peer device or other common network node, and typically includes
12 many or all of the elements described above relative to computer 142, although
13 only a memory storage device 190 has been illustrated in Fig. 2. The logical
14 connections depicted in Fig. 2 include a local area network (LAN) 192 and a wide
15 area network (WAN) 194. Such networking environments are commonplace in
16 offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets, and the Internet. In the
17 described embodiment of the invention, remote computer 188 executes an Internet
18 Web browser program such as the "Internet Explorer" Web browser manufactured
19 and distributed by Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington.

20 When used in a LAN networking environment, computer 142 is connected
21 to the local network 192 through a network interface or adapter 196. When used
22 in a WAN networking environment, computer 142 typically includes a modem 198
23 or other means for establishing communications over the wide area network 194,
24 such as the Internet. The modem 198, which may be internal or external, is
25 connected to the system bus 148 via a serial port interface 168. In a networked

1 environment, program modules depicted relative to the personal computer 142, or
2 portions thereof, may be stored in the remote memory storage device. It will be
3 appreciated that the network connections shown are exemplary and other means of
4 establishing a communications link between the computers may be used.

5 Generally, the data processors of computer 142 are programmed by means
6 of instructions stored at different times in the various computer-readable storage
7 media of the computer. Programs and operating systems are typically distributed,
8 for example, on floppy disks or CD-ROMs. From there, they are installed or
9 loaded into the secondary memory of a computer. At execution, they are loaded at
10 least partially into the computer's primary electronic memory. The invention
11 described herein includes these and other various types of computer-readable
12 storage media when such media contain instructions or programs for implementing
13 the steps described below in conjunction with a microprocessor or other data
14 processor. The invention also includes the computer itself when programmed
15 according to the methods and techniques described below. Furthermore, certain
16 sub-components of the computer may be programmed to perform the functions
17 and steps described below. The invention includes such sub-components when
18 they are programmed as described. In addition, the invention described herein
19 includes data structures, described below, as embodied on various types of
20 memory media.

21 For purposes of illustration, programs and other executable program
22 components such as the operating system are illustrated herein as discrete blocks,
23 although it is recognized that such programs and components reside at various
24 times in different storage components of the computer, and are executed by the
25 data processor(s) of the computer.

Client-Based Multimedia Time-Scale Modification

As shown in Fig. 1, a network system in accordance with the invention includes a network server(s) 102 from which a plurality of media streams are available. In some cases, the media streams are actually stored by server(s) 102. In other cases, server(s) 102 obtain the media streams from other network sources or devices.

The system also includes network clients 104. Generally, the network clients 104 are responsive to user input to request media streams corresponding to selected multimedia content. In response to a request for a media stream corresponding to multimedia content, server(s) 102 streams the requested media streams to the network client 104 in accordance with some known format such as ASF. The client renders the data streams to produce the multimedia content.

A network client 104 also accepts a speed designation from a human user. The speed designation is a speed factor relative to the original or default playback speed of the selected multimedia content. For example, a speed factor of 1.2 indicates that the multimedia content is to be rendered at 1.2 times its original or default speed, thereby achieving time compression. A speed factor of 0.8 indicates that the multimedia content is to be rendered at 0.8 times its original or default speed, thereby achieving time expansion.

In response to the speed designation from the user, the system modifies the timelines of the individual media streams of the multimedia content, while keeping the timelines synchronized with each other and while maintaining the original pitch of any audio produced from audio streams. In one embodiment of the invention, such timeline modification is performed by the network client. In other

1 embodiments of the invention, the timeline modification can be performed at the
2 network server before the media streams are streamed to the network client.

3 Timeline modification changes the timeline of the received data streams in
4 accordance with the user speed designation to achieve either time compression or
5 time expansion (also referred to as "time-scale modification"). With some types
6 of media, such as video, text, and image streams, this involves omitting selected
7 frames or modifying the presentation times of the individual data units or video
8 frames. In other cases, such as with audio streams, the time-modification is more
9 difficult—simply changing the presentation times would alter the pitch of the
10 original audio and make it unintelligible. Accordingly, some type of audio
11 processing technique is used to time-compress or time-expand audio streams,
12 while maintaining the original pitch of the audio—thereby maintaining the
13 intelligibility of the audio.

14 There are various known methods of audio time modification, commonly
15 referred to as "time-scale-modification," most of which concentrate on removing
16 redundant information from the speech signal. In a method referred to as
17 sampling, short segments are dropped from the speech signal at regular intervals.
18 Cross fading or smoothing between adjacent segments improves the resulting
19 sound quality.

20 Another method, referred to as synchronized overlap add method (SOLA or
21 OLA), consists of shifting the beginning of a new speech segment over the end of
22 the preceding segment to find the point of highest cross-correlation (i.e., maximum
23 similarity). The overlapping frames are averaged, or smoothed together, as in the
24 sampling method.
25

1 Sampling with dichotic presentation is a variant of the sampling method
2 that takes advantage of the auditory system's ability to integrate information from
3 both ears. In improves on the sampling method by playing the standard sampled
4 signal to one ear and the "discarded" material to the other ear. Intelligibility and
5 compression increase under this dichotic presentation condition when compared
6 with standard presentation techniques.

7 The methods mentioned above are considered "linear" because all portions
8 of the speech signal are compressed or expanded uniformly. Other methods are
9 considered non-linear because they non-uniformly remove portions of the time
10 signal. One example of a non-linear time-compression method is referred to as
11 pause removal. When using this method, a speed processing algorithm attempts to
12 identify and remove any pauses in a recording. Either linear or non-linear time-
13 scale modification can be used with the invention.

14 More information regarding audio time modification is given in an article
15 that appeared in the March, 1997, issue of "ACM Transactions on Computer-
16 Human Interaction" (Volume 4, Number 1, pages 3-38) (1997). For purposes of
17 this disclosure, it can be assumed that audio time modification involves some
18 combination of changing individual data stream samples, dropping certain
19 samples, and adjusting presentation times of any samples that are actually
20 rendered.

21 Similarly, text streams can also be time-scale modified either linearly or
22 non-linearly. Linear time-scale modification can be accomplished by speeding up
23 or slowing down the rate at which the text data is streamed to the client and/or
24 rendered by the client. Non-linear time-scale modification can be accomplished
25 by using an algorithm to summarize the text data by selecting key words, phrases,

1 sentences or paragraphs. There are various known methods for selecting such
2 words or portions of textual content, such as the term frequency/inverse document
3 frequency technique.

4 Time-scale modification of image streams can also be performed linearly or
5 non-linearly. Linear time-scale modification can be accomplished by speeding up
6 or slowing down the rate at which the image data is streamed to the client and/or
7 rendered by the client. Non-linear time-scale modification can be accomplished
8 by using an algorithm to analyze the images and rank their importance relative to
9 one another. Less important images can then be removed to time-compress the
10 image stream. There are various known methods of determining the importance of
11 images, such as the compressed domain shot boundary detection, pixel-based shot
12 boundary detection, histogram-based shot boundary detection, and feature-based
13 shot boundary detection algorithms.

14 Non-linear time-scale modification of image streams can also be
15 accomplished by using progressive rendering. In progressive rendering, each
16 image is made up of multiple layers that are streamed to the client. These layers
17 are rendered at the client with subsequent layers being overlaid on top of previous
18 layers, each subsequent layer providing further detail to the previous layers. The
19 image stream can thus be time modified by removing (or adding) layers to the
20 images.

21 Animation streams are similar to image streams, except that the images of
22 an animation stream are tied to a timeline. Animation streams can be linearly or
23 non-linearly time-scale modified. Linear time-scale modification can be
24 accomplished by speeding up or slowing down the timeline the images in the
25 animation stream are tied to, thereby reducing or increasing the duration that each

1 image in the animation stream is rendered. Non-linear time-scale modification can
2 also be accomplished using any of the techniques discussed above with reference
3 to image streams.

4 Fig. 3 illustrates an embodiment of the invention in which timeline
5 modification is performed by network client 104. Network server 102 streams a
6 composite media stream 202 to network client 104 (although not shown in Fig. 3,
7 other communications also take place bi-directionally between server 102 and
8 client 104, such as control-oriented communications). The composite media
9 stream 202 has a plurality of individual media streams as described above. For
10 purposes of discussion, it is assumed in this example that the composite media
11 stream has an audio stream, two video streams, a text stream, an image stream, and
12 an animation stream. In the illustrated example, the media streams are received
13 from a single server as a composite media stream. Alternatively, the media
14 streams may be received as individual (or composite) streams from multiple
15 servers.

16 Each media stream has a timeline, and the timelines of the individual
17 streams are synchronized with each other so that the streams can be rendered in
18 combination to produce coordinated multimedia content at the network client 104.
19 The original timelines correspond to the original recording or rendition of the
20 multimedia material, so that rendering the streams according to their timelines
21 results in presentation speeds that closely match the speed of the original event or
22 performance. In the case of audio streams, the timelines preserve the original
23 speed and pitch of the original audio content.

24 The client computer has a demultiplexer component 204 that receives the
25 composite media stream and that separates out the individual media streams from

1 the composite format in which the data is streamed (such as ASF). This results in
2 video streams 206 and 208, an audio stream 210, a text stream 212, an image
3 stream 214, and an animation stream 216. Client 104 includes a different
4 "control" 218, 220, 222, 224, 226, and 228 for each of the media streams 206, 208,
5 210, 212, 214, and 216, respectively. Each of these controls is a set of
6 instructions, executed by a processor of client 104, that manages the presentation
7 of its corresponding media stream. Client 104 also includes a master control 230
8 that coordinates the overall presentation of the media content, as discussed in more
9 detail below.

10 The individual media streams are sent to and received by respective
11 decoders 232, 234, 236, 238, 240, and 242 that perform in accordance with the
12 particular data format being employed. For example, the decoders might perform
13 data decompression.

14 The decoded data streams are then sent to and received by respective time
15 modification components: video timeline modification components 244 and 246,
16 an audio timeline modification component 248, a text timeline modification
17 component 248, an image timeline modification component 252, and an animation
18 timeline modification component 254. These components receive input from a
19 human operator in the form of a speed designation as described above. The
20 timeline modification components change the timelines of the received media
21 streams in accordance with the user speed designation to achieve either linear time
22 compression or linear time expansion. With some types of media (e.g., with video
23 streams, text streams, image streams, or animation streams) this involves either
24 omitting selected portions of the streams or modifying the presentation times of
25 the individual data units or frames of the stream. In other cases (e.g., with audio

streams), some type of audio processing technique as the SOLA technique described above is used to time-compress or time-expand audio streams, while maintaining the original pitch of the audio and to also retain the intelligibility of the audio.

The timeline modification components 244 – 254 produce individual media streams that are provided to and received by respective renderers 256, 258, 260, 262, 264, and 266. The rendering components 256 – 266 render the streams in accordance with their modified timelines, as the streams continue to be streamed from the network server. In alternative embodiments of the invention, timeline modification components 244 – 254 might be eliminated and their functions performed by decoders 232 – 242.

Note that the speed designation, provided by the user, dictates the rate at which the network client consumes the composite data stream. Because of this, the client communicates the speed designation to the network server when requesting a particular media stream. The server responds by streaming the media stream at a rate that depends on or is proportional to the speed designation provided by the user. For example, for a speed factor of 2.0, the client consumes data at twice the normal rate. Accordingly, the server streams the media stream at twice its normal rate to meet the demands of the client.

In the described embodiment, the user is allowed to change the speed designation during rendering of the multimedia content. In some cases, however, it may not be possible to change the playback speed without interrupting the playback momentarily. If this is the case, playback resumes as soon as possible, beginning at a point that shortly precedes the point at which playback was discontinued. Thus, there is some overlap in the presentation—when the

1 presentation resumes, the overlap provides context for the new content that
2 follows.

3 Fig. 4 illustrates an exemplary process for client-based multimedia time-
4 scale modification. Steps performed at network client 104 are shown on the left-
5 hand side of the figure, while steps performed by network server 102 are shown on
6 the right-hand side of the drawing. The process of Fig. 4 may be performed in
7 software, and is described with additional reference to components in Fig. 3.

8 Multimedia content from network server 102 is selected for rendering at
9 network client 102 (step 282). In most cases, a user performs this selection from a
10 menu of available content or via an URL (uniform resource locator) selection. In
11 some cases, different media streams might be available for a particular content
12 segment, varying perhaps in quality and in required bandwidth. Preferably,
13 however, the user is unaware of anything except the simple act of selecting a
14 single topic or composite stream.

15 A speed designation for the multimedia content is accepted from a human
16 user (step 284). This step is independent of the previous step of selecting the
17 content itself. Furthermore, the user can vary the speed designation at any time
18 during presentation of the selected content, without having to re-select the content.

19 The selected content is requested from the server at a speed that will satisfy
20 the requirements of the user's speed designation (step 286). Based on this request,
21 the server identifies the particular composite media stream corresponding to the
22 selected content (step 288). The server streams this composite media stream to the
23 client (step 290). In this embodiment, the composite media stream has its original
24 timeline, which does not necessarily result in the speed that the user has
25 designated for playback.

1 The client receives the streaming content (step 292) and modifies the
2 timeline of the media stream(s) in accordance with the speed designation provided
3 by the user (step 294). As described above, this involves modifying the timelines
4 of the individual media streams while maintaining their synchronization and
5 intelligibility. The composite media stream is then rendered in accordance with its
6 modified timeline (step 296).

7 8 **Server-Based Multimedia Time-Scale Modification**

9 In various embodiments of the invention, modifying the timeline of the
10 requested multimedia content can be performed dynamically (or “on the fly”) in
11 the client as described above, in the server, or in both the client and server. In
12 embodiments where the timeline modification for a stream is carried out at the
13 server the time modification component 244 – 254 of Fig. 3 for that stream need
14 not be included in client 104. Rather, components 244 – 254 would be included in
15 the corresponding server that is providing the stream. Additionally, modifying the
16 timeline of different streams for requested multimedia content can be performed in
17 different locations for different streams. For example, audio and video timeline
18 modification may be performed at the server, while image, animation, and text
19 timeline modification may be performed at the client. However, in the network
20 environment, it is often desirable to avoid performing any significant timeline
21 modification in the server. Otherwise, the server could quickly become
22 overloaded with requests from multiple clients.

23 Alternatively, in some cases it may be desirable to store multiple versions
24 of media streams at a server and to select particular versions of the media streams
25 depending on the timeline requirements of the client, as designated by the user.

1 One advantage of this method is that it can require comparatively less
2 communications bandwidth between the server and client.

3 As a general example, a server might store a plurality of media streams
4 having timelines modified by different factors. When a client requests a
5 composite media stream, the server selects the version of the media stream whose
6 timeline most closely accords with the speed designation set by the user. If the
7 timeline does not exactly match the speed designation, the client can perform
8 further timeline modification.

9 Fig. 5 illustrates a more specific example. In this embodiment, a server 302
10 stores multiple media streams 304 corresponding to specific multimedia content
11 306. The media streams are of different types, such as audio, video, image, and
12 text. In Fig. 5, audio streams are designated by the letter "A", video streams are
13 designated by the letter "V", image streams are designated by the letter "I", and
14 text streams are designated by the letter "T". Any combination of a single audio
15 stream, a single video stream, a single image stream, and a single text stream can
16 be rendered to produce the multimedia content.

17 The various individual data streams have timelines that are modified by
18 different degrees. The speed factors are indicated in Fig. 5. In this embodiment,
19 the audio, video, text, and image streams are organized as sets, each set forming a
20 composite media stream having a timeline that has been modified by a factor of
21 0.5, 1.0, or 1.5.

22 When a client 308 requests multimedia content from server 302, the client
23 308 identifies both the content and the speed factor. In response, the server selects
24 the audio, video, image, and text streams that have timelines most closely
25 approximating the identified speed factor, and combines those individual media

1 streams to form the composite media stream. The resulting composite media
2 stream is then sent to the client. When the timeline is accelerated, this saves
3 bandwidth in comparison to sending an unaltered composite media stream having
4 a higher streaming rate to meet the accelerated consumption demands of the client.

5 As a further optimization, the server can store composite media streams
6 having different degrees of timeline modification and different degrees of quality.
7 Generally, a media stream of a lower quality will consume less communications
8 bandwidth than a media stream of a higher quality. Before selecting an
9 appropriate media stream, the server determines the available bandwidth between
10 the server and the client. It then selects a combination of individual media streams
11 that provides the best quality while requiring no more than the available
12 bandwidth.

13 Fig. 6 illustrates a further example utilizing this concept. In this case, a
14 server 310 has stored a single audio stream 312, a single text stream 314, multiple
15 video streams 316, and multiple image streams 318, all corresponding to a single
16 multimedia segment 320. The video streams and image streams differ in quality
17 and corresponding required bandwidth: low (lo), intermediate (med), and high
18 (hi). However, the video streams and the image streams all have a common,
19 unmodified timeline.

20 When a client 322 requests the multimedia content from server 310, the
21 server determines or notes both the speed factor designated by the user and the
22 available bandwidth. It then selects the video stream that has best available
23 quality while also requiring no more bandwidth (at the requested speed factor)
24 than the difference between the available bandwidth and the bandwidth consumed
25

1 by the selected audio stream. Again, this allows the system to compensate for
2 various available bandwidths.

3 Fig. 7 shows another example, in which a server 328 has stored multiple
4 text streams 330 and multiple image streams 332, all corresponding to a single
5 multimedia segment 334. The text streams differ in the degree by which their
6 timelines have been modified. In this example, there are text streams having
7 timelines modified by factors of 0.5, 1.0, and 1.5. The image streams differ in
8 quality and corresponding required bandwidth: low (lo), intermediate (med), and
9 high (hi). However, the image streams all have a common, unmodified timeline.

10 When a client 336 requests the multimedia content from server 328, the
11 server determines or notes both the speed factor designated by the user and the
12 available bandwidth. It then selects a text stream that most closely accords with
13 the specified speed factor. It then selects the image stream that has best available
14 quality while also requiring no more bandwidth than the difference between the
15 available bandwidth and the bandwidth consumed by the selected text stream.
16 Again, this allows the system to compensate for various available bandwidths.

17 Fig. 8 illustrates yet another embodiment in which multiple media streams
18 are stored at the server for use depending upon available bandwidth and upon the
19 speed factor designated by the user. In this embodiment, a server 340 stores a
20 single text stream 342 and multiple image streams 344, all corresponding to and
21 representing the same multimedia content 346. The text stream has an unaltered
22 timeline. However, the image streams have different timelines and also vary by
23 quality and corresponding bandwidth requirements. Specifically, in this example
24 the image streams have timelines modified by factors of 0.5, 1.0, and 2.0. For
25

1 each speed factor, there is a "low" bandwidth image stream having a relatively low
2 quality, and a "high" bandwidth image stream having a relatively high quality.

3 At a normal, unaltered playback rate, assume the text stream utilizes a
4 bandwidth of 16 Kbps (kilobits per second), the low bandwidth image streams
5 require a bandwidth of 20 Kbps, and while the high bandwidth image streams
6 require a bandwidth of 40 Kbps. Now, suppose that a client requests the
7 multimedia content over a communications channel having a bandwidth of 56
8 Kbps, at a speed factor of 2.0. At this speed factor, the client consumes text data
9 at twice the normal rate, which in this case is 32 Kbps. That leaves 24 Kbps of
10 available bandwidth. Accordingly, the server selects the low bandwidth image
11 stream with the timeline modified by a factor of 2.0, and combines it with the text
12 stream to form a composite media stream for streaming to the client. The total
13 required communications bandwidth is 52 Kbps, which is within the limits of the
14 available bandwidth.

15 Although the example given with reference to Fig. 8 is relatively specific,
16 this method of bandwidth utilization can be generalized to include other types of
17 media streams with each stream being assigned a priority.

18 Furthermore, a stream can sometimes be timeline-modified dynamically at
19 the server without incurring significant overhead. Accordingly, the server can
20 adjust the timeline and quality of the stream dynamically to match the available
21 bandwidth, eliminating the need to store multiple streams of the same content at
22 the server. As an example of a situation where this might be easily accomplished,
23 an MPEG (Motion Picture Expert Group) video stream contains independent
24 frames and several levels of dependent frames. One easy way to reduce
25 bandwidth is to simply drop lower-level dependent frames from the video stream.

1 Additionally, although Figs. 5 – 8 illustrate the streaming of all media
2 streams for particular multimedia content from a single server, the streams can
3 alternatively be streamed from multiple servers. Thus, rather than streaming a
4 composite stream from a single server that includes all the data streams for a
5 particular multimedia presentation, the individual streams can be received from
6 different servers. Additionally, multiple composite streams can be received from
7 different servers, such as a composite stream from one server including image and
8 text data streams, and another composite stream from another server including
9 audio and video data streams. Additional communication between servers or
10 between the client and servers may be required when multiple servers are
11 streaming the data for particular multimedia content. For example, the text stream
12 and corresponding required bandwidth selected by one server (or the client) can be
13 communicated to the other server(s) to allow the other server(s) to determine the
14 amount of available bandwidth.

15 16 **Stream Synchronization**

17 Media content can be provided to the client 104 of Fig. 3 from one or more
18 servers 102 as discussed above. Different time-scale modification techniques can
19 be used for each of the different streams. For example, video(1) time modification
20 component 244 of Fig. 3 may use a non-linear compression algorithm, while
21 video(2) time modification component 246 may use a linear compression
22 algorithm. Additionally, time-scale modification for some streams may be carried
23 out at client 104 and time-scale modification for other streams may be carried out
24 at the server.
25

1 Master control 230 of Fig. 3 coordinates the time-scale modification of all
2 the streams in the multimedia content. Master control 230 receives user requests
3 for changes in the playback speed of the multimedia content. Such changes are
4 communicated to the individual stream controls 218 – 228 or to the server(s) that
5 are providing the time-scale modification (whether it be dynamically modified or
6 pre-stored streams) for the individual stream(s). Alternatively, the coordination
7 provided by master control 230 can be distributed partly or wholly throughout
8 controls 218 – 228, thereby embedding the coordination of presenting a stream
9 wholly or partly in the control of that stream.

10 When master control 230 receives a user request for a new playback speed
11 for the multimedia content, master control 230 sends a message to each of the
12 individual stream controls 218 – 228 of the new playback speed. This message is
13 used by the corresponding time modification components 244 – 254 (whether they
14 be located in the client 104 or server 102) to change the time-scale modification
15 being performed to the new playback speed.

16 In an alternate embodiment, master control 230 does not send such
17 messages to the individual stream controls 218 – 228. Rather, master control 230
18 maintains a presentation clock referred to as the “master clock”. Each of the
19 individual stream controls 218 – 228 maintains its own clock, referred to as a
20 “slave clock”, that the respective controls 218 – 228 synchronize with the master
21 clock. The controls 218 – 228 monitor the master clock and keep their slave
22 clocks in pace with the master clock, speeding up or slowing down their respective
23 slave clocks as the master clock speeds up or slows down.

24 By maintaining a master clock and slave clock relationship, each of the
25 controls 218 – 228 is alleviated of the burden of providing “elegant” time-scale

1 modification. That is, some of the controls 218 – 228 may not have the ability to
2 speed up or slow down the rate at which the media stream is rendered, remove less
3 important portions of the media stream, etc. Rather, these controls may merely be
4 able to detect when they are out of synchronization with the master clock and
5 either jump ahead in their rendering or temporarily pause their rendering until they
6 are re-synchronized.

7 Master control 230 may also perform additional monitoring of the
8 multimedia content and alter the time-scale modification being performed based
9 on available bandwidth between the server and client and/or based on the
10 processing capabilities of the client.

11 Fig. 9 illustrates an exemplary process used by master control 230 to alter
12 the streaming and time-scale modification for the multimedia content. The
13 process of Fig. 9 may be performed in software. Fig. 9 is described with
14 additional reference to components in Fig. 3.

15 Master control 230 monitors the usage of both the bandwidth between
16 server 102 and client 104 and the processing capabilities of client 104 (step 352).
17 Master control 230 can be either pre-programmed or dynamically programmed
18 with the server to client bandwidth devoted to streaming the multimedia content
19 and the processing capabilities of client 104 devoted to playing back the
20 multimedia content. Master control 230 compares these programmed values to the
21 current bandwidth and processing usage to determine whether to make an
22 alteration in a stream(s). The monitoring of step 352 can be performed
23 continually, or alternatively in response to certain events (such as a new playback
24 speed being requested by the user).
25

1 The monitored and programmed values are used to determine whether the
2 bandwidth allotted to streaming the data or the processing capacity has been
3 exceeded (step 354). Such changes can result, for example, due to a user request
4 for a faster playback speed, or a reduction in the amount of bandwidth or
5 processing capacity that can be devoted to streaming or playing back of the
6 multimedia content.

7 If the allotted bandwidth or processing capacity has been exceeded, then
8 master control 230 selects a stream(s) to be altered (step 356). The selection of
9 stream(s) can be accomplished in a variety of manners. An ordered list can be
10 provided to the master control (e.g., generated by the author of master control 230,
11 by the author of the multimedia content or the user of client 104) that identifies the
12 order in which streams are to be selected. Alternatively, each stream may be given
13 a priority ranking and this priority ranking used by master control 230 to
14 determine which stream to select for alteration (e.g., the lowest priority stream).

15 Master control also alters the selected stream(s) to conform to the current
16 bandwidth and processing capacity requirements (step 358). In the illustrated
17 example this alteration includes one or more of transferring time-scale
18 modification for a selected stream(s) from client 104 to server 102, reducing the
19 quality of the selected stream(s), or pausing a selected stream(s). Which of these
20 actions is to be performed by master control can be determined by a set of rules
21 programmed into master control 230. These rules can be generated by, for
22 example, the author of master control 230, the author of the multimedia content, or
23 the user of client 104. For example, the rules may indicate that all streams should
24 continue to be played back regardless of the quality reduction of the selected
25 streams, the rules may indicate that time-modification of only certain streams can

1 be transferred to the client, the rules may indicate that audio or text streams should
2 be paused rather than reducing the quality of any of the other streams, etc. Master
3 control 230 sends messages to the appropriate individual stream controls as well as
4 the appropriate servers to change the quality of a stream, pause a stream, or
5 transfer time-scale modification processing from the local stream control to the
6 server.

7 Returning to step 352, master control 230 also checks whether there is
8 excess bandwidth or processing capacity that it can use (step 360). Such excess
9 bandwidth or processing capacity can arise, for example, due to a reduction in the
10 playback speed of the multimedia content or extra capacity or bandwidth being
11 devoted to streaming or playback of the multimedia content. If such excess
12 bandwidth or processing capacity is detected, master control 230 selects a
13 stream(s) to alter (step 362). This selection process is analogous to that of step
14 356, except that the ordering of streams may be “reversed”. For example, higher
15 priority streams may be selected for improved quality due to the excess bandwidth
16 or processing capacity. Alternatively, master control 230 may select the same
17 streams that were previously selected for alteration in step 356.

18 Master control 230 also alters the selected stream(s) to take advantage of
19 the excess bandwidth or processing capacity. This alteration is analogous to that
20 of step 358, or alternatively may be to “undo” whatever alteration was previously
21 performed for the stream in step 358. In making the selection and alteration in
22 steps 362 and 364, master control 230 compares the bandwidth and processing
23 capacities of the proposed alteration to the excess bandwidth or processing
24 capacity to verify that neither the bandwidth nor the processing capacity devoted
25 to the multimedia content is exceeded. For example, excess processing capacity at

1 client 104 may be available, but the first alteration that master control 230 would
2 want to make may exceed the bandwidth constraints and therefore cannot be
3 carried out. Thus, master control 230 tests another alteration. If no alteration can
4 be made that violates neither the bandwidth nor the processing capacities, then no
5 alteration is made.

6 The operation of master control 230 in altering the streaming and the time-
7 scale modification of the multimedia content is further illustrated in the following
8 example. Assume that the bandwidth devoted to multimedia content is 150 Kbps
9 and that the multimedia content includes two video streams, an image stream, an
10 audio stream, and a text stream. Further assume that the time-scale modification
11 of each of the video streams is performed at the client, that the time-scale
12 modification of the image, audio, and text streams is performed at the server, and
13 that at a speedup factor of 1.0, the video streams each require 30 Kbps, the image
14 and audio streams each require 20 Kbps, and the text stream requires 10 Kbps. At
15 the speedup factor of 1.0, the streams require only 110 Kbps of the available 150
16 Kbps of bandwidth. If the playback speed is increased to a speedup factor of 1.5,
17 the video streams would require 45 Kbps of bandwidth to be time-compressed at
18 the client, while the image and audio streams would still require 20 Kbps and the
19 text stream 10 Kbps as these streams are being time-compressed at the server. At
20 the speedup factor of 1.5, the streams require only 140 Kbps of the available 150
21 Kbps of bandwidth. However, if the speedup factor were to be increased to 2.0,
22 then the video streams would require 60 Kbps while the image, audio, and text
23 streams would require 20 Kbps, 20 Kbps, and 10 Kbps, respectively. The streams
24 would require a total of 170 Kbps, which is not available. Thus, the master control
25 would select and alter at least one of the streams, such as selecting one of the

1 video streams for time-scale modification at the server (which would reduce the
2 bandwidth requirements to 140 Kbps), or pause the text stream so it is no longer
3 being streamed (which would reduce the bandwidth requirements to 150 Kbps).

4 5 **Timeline Correlation**

6 When the playback speed of the multimedia content is altered by the user,
7 the playback of the multimedia content should continue in a relatively
8 uninterrupted manner, albeit at the new playback speed. For example, suppose a
9 user changes the playback speed from a speedup factor of 1.0 to a speedup factor
10 of 1.5. The playback of the multimedia content should continue at approximately
11 the location where the playback speed change was requested by the user rather
12 than beginning playback at the beginning of the multimedia content at the new
13 playback speed.

14 If timeline modification is performed at the client or is performed
15 dynamically at the server, then the client or server can begin timeline modification
16 when the user request is received. As the timeline modification is being
17 performed "on the fly" on the same underlying data stream, difficulties in
18 maintaining timeline correlation typically do not arise.

19 However, in situations where multiple versions of a media stream are stored
20 at a server (e.g., as discussed above with reference to Figs. 5 – 8), timeline
21 correlation problems can arise. In order for the server to switch from one data
22 stream to another (corresponding to the new playback speed), the correct location
23 in the new stream to begin streaming needs to be determined.

24 In order to make such determinations, one of the versions of a particular
25 data stream (e.g., one of the video streams 304 of Fig. 5) is referred to as a primary

1 or reference version of the media stream. A primary media stream normally has a
2 timeline that has not been altered. The remaining versions of the data stream
3 stored by the server are media streams having timelines that have been altered in
4 accordance with linear and/or non-linear techniques.

5 There is a known timeline correlation between the data units of the various
6 media streams. The term "timeline correlation" as used herein refers to a
7 correlation in content between two streams that differ in the degree and/or manner
8 in which their timelines have been modified. Thus, a playback point one minute
9 into an unaltered timeline correlates to a point thirty seconds into a timeline that
10 has been linearly altered by a factor of 2.0 (accelerated to twice the speed of the
11 original). More generally, the point in the new timeline equals
12 $\text{oldtime}(\text{oldfactor}/\text{newfactor})$, where oldtime is the presentation time in the first
13 media stream at which the speed change is to occur, oldfactor is the playback
14 speed or factor of the old media stream, and newfactor is the playback speed or
15 factor of the new media stream.

16 When non-linear timeline alteration is involved, the correlation between
17 streams cannot be calculated in this manner. In the illustrated example, the
18 timeline correlations are compiled and stored as the non-linear compression is
19 performed. The stored data is then referenced by the system when it becomes
20 necessary to find content in one stream corresponding to the same content in
21 another stream.

22 Specifically, the server stores one or more sets of timeline correlations
23 between the timelines of the primary and timeline-altered media streams. These
24 sets of correlations are arranged to allow each cross-referencing between the
25 various streams. For example, one set of correlations contains mappings from

1 presentation times of the primary media stream to timeline-correlated presentation
2 times of the timeline-altered media streams. Other sets of correlations correspond
3 to individual ones of the time-altered media streams. Each of these sets contains
4 mappings from presentation times of the corresponding timeline-altered media
5 stream to correlated presentation times of the primary media stream.

6 Fig. 10 illustrates this more clearly. Shown in Fig. 10 are a primary media
7 stream 370, a first timeline-altered media stream 372, and a second timeline-
8 altered media stream 374. In this example, the timeline-altered media streams
9 have corresponding timelines that are non-linearly altered relative to the timeline
10 of the primary media stream.

11 Also shown in Fig. 10 are reference tables or data objects corresponding to
12 the media streams. Table 376, associated with primary media stream 370, is a
13 cross-reference containing mappings from presentation times of the primary media
14 stream to timeline-correlated presentation times of the first and second media
15 streams. Table 376 is indexed by presentation times of the primary media stream.
16 Thus, for any given presentation time of the primary media stream, it is possible to
17 quickly find a corresponding or timeline-correlated presentation time in either of
18 the two timeline-altered media streams.

19 By itself, table 376 is useful when switching from primary media stream
20 370 to one of the timeline-altered media streams 372 and 374. To transition, for
21 instance, from the primary media stream to the first timeline-altered media stream,
22 the current presentation time of the primary media stream is noted. This
23 presentation time is used as an index into table 376 to find the correlated
24 presentation time in the first media stream. The first media stream is then initiated
25 at the correlated time as found in the table.

1 Further tables or data objects 378 and 380 are associated respectively with
2 first and second timeline-altered media streams 372 and 374, and are used as back-
3 references to the primary media stream. Each of these tables is indexed by the
4 presentation times of its associated media stream, to find timeline-correlated
5 presentation times in the primary media stream.

6 The tables or data objects can be stored and referenced by server 102.
7 Alternatively, they can be stored by server 102 and downloaded to client 104 as
8 needed. As a further alternative, the data objects with the timeline-altered media
9 streams can be provided with individual data units of the timeline-altered media
10 streams. In accordance with this further alternative, each data unit is accompanied
11 by a presentation time at which the data unit is to be rendered, and also by a
12 reference presentation time, where the reference presentation time indicates a
13 presentation time in the primary reference stream that corresponds to the
14 presentation time of the data unit in the timeline-altered media stream. This
15 reference presentation time is then used to index table 376 associated with primary
16 stream 360.

17 Fig. 11 illustrates the process used to find an appropriate presentation time
18 in the second timeline-altered media stream, when switching from the first
19 timeline-altered media stream to the second timeline-altered media stream. The
20 process of Fig. 11 may be performed in software. Fig. 11 is described with
21 additional reference to components in Fig. 10.

22 Playback of the first media stream is initially stopped at a particular
23 presentation time of the first media stream (step 390). A stored table or cross-
24 reference 378 is referenced to determine a presentation time of the primary media
25 stream that has a timeline correlation with the particular presentation time at which

1 playback of the first media stream was stopped (step 392). A table 376 of primary
2 media stream 370 is then referred to in order to determine a presentation time of
3 the second media stream that has a timeline correlation with the determined
4 presentation time of the primary media stream (step 394). Playback of the second
5 media stream is then initiated at a point in the second media stream having a
6 presentation time that is no greater than the determined presentation time (step
7 396). In the described embodiment of the invention, playback is initiated
8 somewhat prior to the determined presentation time, thus providing a short overlap
9 in the rendered content to provide context when initiating the second timeline-
10 altered media stream in midstream.

11 The referencing steps are illustrated in Fig. 10. An arrow from the
12 reference table 378 of first media stream 372 indicates that the table 378 is used to
13 find a time-correlated presentation time in the primary media stream. This value is
14 used to index table 376 of primary stream 370 to find a timeline-correlated
15 presentation time in second media stream 374.

16 17 User Experience

18 The functionality described above is exposed through an application
19 program executed at network client 104, referred to herein as a streaming
20 multimedia player. The streaming multimedia player may be incorporated into the
21 operating system or run as a separate, self-contained application. In either case,
22 the streaming multimedia player operates in a graphical user interface windowing
23 environment such as provided by the "Windows" brand of operating systems,
24 available from Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington..
25

Fig. 12 shows one implementation of a graphical user interface window 400 for the multimedia player. This UI window 400 has a command bar 402, a media screen 404, shuttle controls 406, a volume control 408, and content information space 410. Command bar 402 lists familiar UI commands, such as "File", "View", and so forth.

Media screen 404 is the region of the UI within which the visual media stream(s) is rendered. For video, image, animation, and text streams, the underlying video, images, animations, and text are displayed on screen 404. Each of these streams can be displayed in a different portion of the screen 204 (alternatively, one or more of the portions may be overlapped by another portion).

Shuttle controls 406 enable the user to control play of the multimedia content. Shuttle controls 406 include multiple play buttons 412(1), 412(2), and 412(3), a stop button 414, a pause button 416, rewind buttons 418 and 420, and fast forward buttons 422 and 424.

Play buttons 412(1) – 412(3) are associated with different playback speeds of the multimedia content. In this illustration, play button 412(1) corresponds to a normal playback speed (i.e., "x1.0"), play button 412(2) corresponds to a faster playback speed with a speed up factor of 25% (i.e., "x1.25"), and play button 412(3) corresponds to an even faster playback speed with a speed up factor of 50% (i.e., "x1.50"). It is noted, however, that more or less than three buttons may be used (e.g., two, four, five, etc.) and may correspond to speeds both above and below the normalized speed of "x1.0".

The user can actuate one of the play buttons via a UI actuation mechanism, such as a pointer 426 or by tabbing to the desired play button and hitting the "enter" key. Upon selection of a play button, the multimedia player plays the

1 multimedia content at the playback speed associated with the selected play button.
2 For instance, if the user selects play button 412(2) with a 25% speedup factor, the
3 multimedia player plays the content at a playback speed of 1.25 times the original
4 or default playback speed.

5 Once the multimedia content is playing at one speed, the user is free to
6 select a new speed by actuating another of the play buttons 412(1) – 412(3).
7 Suppose the user decides to slow the content back to normal speed. The user can
8 actuate the “x1.0” play button 412(1) to return the media content to the normal
9 speed. In response to speed changes, the multimedia player is configured to repeat
10 a portion of the multimedia content at the new speed.

11 Content information space 410 lists information pertaining to the
12 multimedia content being rendered on the media screen 404. The content
13 information space includes the show name, author and copyright information, and
14 tracking/timing data.

15 Fig. 13 shows another implementation of a graphical user interface window
16 440 for the multimedia player. Like UI 400 of Fig. 11, UI 440 has command bar
17 402, media screen 404, shuttle controls 406, volume control 408, and content
18 information space 410. This implementation, however, employs only a single play
19 button 442. Actuation of play button 442 initiates play of the multimedia content.

20 UI 440 has a scale mechanism 444 to vary the speed of the content during
21 rendering. The scale mechanism has a range of playback speeds 446, which in this
22 example range from 0.5x to 2.5x the normal speed. Scale mechanism 444 also has
23 a movable slider 448 that is movable over the range 446. The user can position
24 the slider 448 at the desired speed at which the multimedia player is to play the
25 multimedia content.

1 In the Fig. 13 illustration, range 446 is a continuous range from a high
2 playback speed (i.e., 2.5x) to a low playback speed (i.e., 0.5x). Slider 448 moves
3 continuously over the range. In other implementations, range 446 is a discrete
4 range of discrete playback speeds (e.g., 0.5x, 1.0x, 1.5x, 2.0x, and 2.5x) and the
5 slider is movable among the discrete playback speeds.

6 Once the multimedia content is playing at one speed, the user is free to
7 select a new speed by moving the slider 448 to a new speed. In response to use
8 manipulation of the scale mechanism, the multimedia player repeats a portion of
9 the multimedia content and begins playing at the new speed.

10 Fig. 14 shows a third implementation of a graphical user interface window
11 460 for the multimedia player. In this implementation, UI 460 has a single play
12 button 462 to initiate playback of the multimedia content. UI 460 also has a menu
13 464 associated with the play button. In this illustration, menu 464 is a drop-down
14 or pull-down menu that opens beneath the play button in response to actuation of a
15 tab 466 adjacent to the play button. Alternatively, menu 464 may be invoked by
16 placing pointer 426 over play button 462 and right clicking a mouse button.

17 Menu 464 lists multiple playback speeds from which a user can select. In
18 the illustrated example, five playback speeds are listed: x0.5, x0.75, x1.0, x1.25,
19 and x1.5. The user can select one of the listed speeds to instruct the multimedia
20 player to play the multimedia content at a desired speed. As noted above, the user
21 can select a new speed after the content has begun playing by invoking the menu
22 and selecting the new speed. In response, the multimedia player repeats a portion
23 of the multimedia content and begins playing at the new speed.

24 Although the invention has been described in language specific to structural
25 features and/or methodological steps, it is to be understood that the invention

1 defined in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or
2 steps described. Rather, the specific features and steps are disclosed as preferred
3 forms of implementing the claimed invention.